

# On Being Human

How Islam addresses othering, dehumanisation and empathy

Dr. Osman Latiff



SAPIENCE  
INSTITUTE



# The humanness of our encounters

- Harry Leslie Smith (*Harry's Last Stand*) and his clinking spoon to cup.
- The idea is to see the other as a **complex human being**.
- To be genuinely curious about another person and to realise that experiences affect different people in different ways, and to **not be presumptuous** about one person's attitude and viewpoints due to an attitude formed about the group to which the other belongs, or because of views his in-group has formed about one's self is a **requirement of empathy**.

# Seeing the Human

**“Consider the human self, and how it is formed in accordance with what it is meant to be and how it is imbued with moral failings as well as with consciousness of God!”**

The Qur'an, Chapter 91, Verses 7 to 8

The human being is made of many parts – body, heart, mind and soul, consciousness



- Musa's encounter with Fir'own

*“Go to Pharaoh, for he has truly transgressed  
‘all bounds’.*

*And say, ‘Would you ‘be willing to’ purify  
yourself,  
and let me guide you to your Lord so that you  
will be in awe ‘of Him’?” 79:17-19*

- The blind man Ibn Umm Maktum

*He frowned and turned ‘his attention’ away,  
‘simply’ because the blind man came to him  
‘interrupting’.*

*You never know ‘O Prophet’, perhaps he may be  
purified, 80:1-3*



- Ibrahim and his people's sudden lapse

*They asked, “Was it you who did this to our gods, O Abraham?”*

*He replied ‘sarcastically’, “No, this one—the biggest of them—did it! So ask them, if they can talk!”*

*So they came back to their senses, saying ‘to one another’, “You yourselves are truly the wrongdoers!”*

*Then they ‘quickly’ regressed to their ‘original’ mind-set, ‘arguing,’ “You already know that those ‘idols’ cannot talk.”*

*21:62-65*



# What is Othering?

- There are too many positive human attributes which prevent us from seeing others as expendable, dehumanised and othered, impeding us from acting in cruelty and with murderous intent.
- Dehumanisation is to undermine those impediments. Chris Weedon defines *Othering* as referring to the process of: “**constructing another people or group as radically different to oneself or one’s own group, usually on the basis of racist and/or ethnocentric discourses.**”



# What is Othering?

- A negating of another's individual and social worth – social death
- In-grouping and out-grouping
- Othering based on disability/race/socioeconomic status
- Othering is caricaturising, a false creation
- Generalising
- Marginalisation and discrimination



# What is Othering?

## **Understand humans as flawed and contradictory characters**

How can a loving father, husband and son to his own family brutally torture, maim and kill others with indifference? Individuals can drastically fluctuate from one state to another.

“...Thus the Commandant at Belsen  
Camp going home for  
the day with fumes of  
human roast clinging  
rebelliously to his hairy  
nostrils will stop  
at the wayside sweet-shop  
and pick up a chocolate  
for his tender offspring  
waiting at home for Daddy’s return ...” (Chinua Achebe, ‘Vultures’)



# What is Othering?

## **Understand humans as flawed and contradictory characters**

Colonel Michael Lenahan, a Predator pilot and operations director for the 196th Reconnaissance Squadron, says:

“It’s bizarre, I guess. It is quite different – going from potentially shooting a missile, then going to your kid’s soccer game”: a killer in the morning and a father in the evening.”

Matt J. Martin, *Predator: The Remote-Control Air War over Iraq and Afghanistan: A Pilot’s Story* (Minneapolis, Zenith Press: 2010), p. 85.



# What is Othering?

## **Understand humans as flawed and contradictory characters**

Israeli Army combat soldier Eran Efrati – Hebron - layers of dehumanising

“How can a Nazi soldier get up in the morning, give his wife a hug and kiss and go out to the camp and do his job? I just couldn’t understand it. And when I got into the Occupied Territories for the first time, I understood how there can be a contradiction inside yourself. As a human being you can do your job and be one person at home – be a loving, caring boyfriend, or son, or brother and at the same time hold people under a regime so oppressed that people are dying not only from your bullets but from the amount of calories entered into their territories like in Gaza, from oppression or sickness. This realisation during my time as a soldier... put me on the right side of history.”

Empire Files: Israeli Army Vet’s Exposé - “I Was the Terrorist”, - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Rk1dAlhiVc&t=1390s>.



# What is Othering?

## Prophetic Advice to Abu Dharr

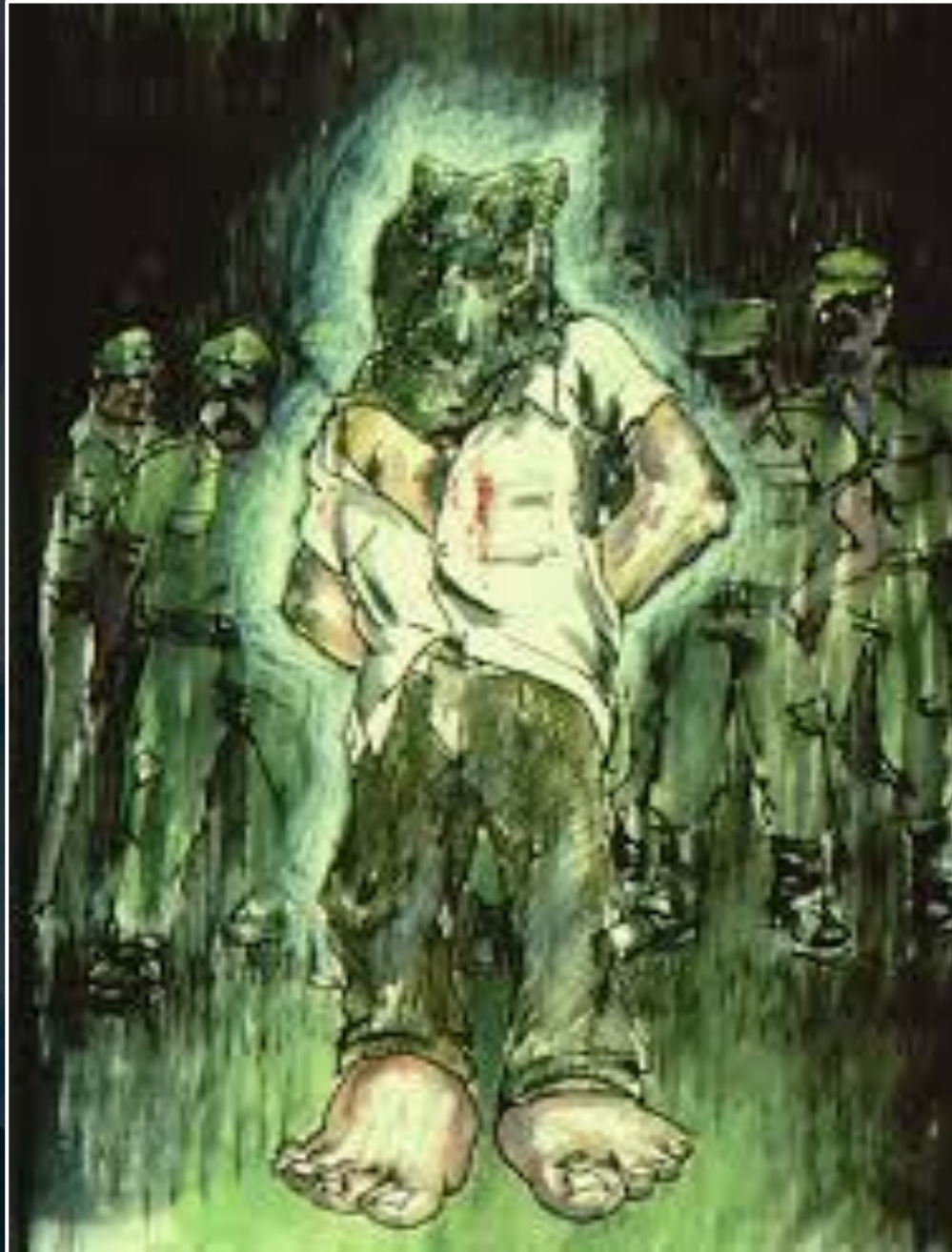
Abu Dharr reported: My dear friend, the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, instructed me with virtuous traits. He instructed me not to look at those above me and to look at those below me. He instructed me to love the poor and be close to them. He instructed me to maintain my family ties even if they turn their backs. He instructed me not to fear the blame of the blamer in the matter of Allah. He instructed me to speak the truth even if it is bitter. He instructed me to increase in declaring there is no movement or might but in Allah, for it is a treasure among the treasures of Paradise.

Source: Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān 449



Surrounded by  
Torturers He Cannot  
See, Anonymous,  
watercolour on  
paper, 8.27” 11.69”,  
early 1980s.

Image courtesy of the  
Rehabilitation and  
Research Centre for Torture  
Victims, Copenhagen,  
Denmark.



Who and what  
do we see?



# Who and what do we see?

- Juxtaposed observations
  - Halo
  - Swollen feet - stamped presence?
  - Hood - bear-like
  - Hands – unseen
  - Juxtaposing of isolation and togetherness - pack/predator/prey – irony
  - Worry and pain/defiance and strength
  - Clothing - between civil and savage



## Who and what do we see?

“When a torturer looks upon his victim he can certainly directly see agony in his face and humiliation in his posture. The problem, though, **is the light in which he sees it.** It is not a matter of the torturer needing to infer a little further to another, ‘more inner’ realm in which the ‘moral properties’ of the Other’s situation will be revealed. **It is a matter of how he sees the Other’s condition.** The torturer has the reality of the Other’s suffering squarely in front of him, under a clear light – but **that light is somehow wrong.** It is a peculiarly cold and harsh light, one that flattens and exposes the Other, cuts and holds him open, all the better to probe and toy with him. **What is needed is a different light.**”

K. Tudor (2011). *Understanding Empathy.*



# Who and what do we see?

## Constructing Self/Other identities through place-making

- Kayla Williams – “It also made methink,” Williams says, “what are we as humans, that we do this to each other? It mademe question my humanity and the humanity of all Americans.”
- “It also made me think,” Williams says, “**what are we as humans, that we do this to each other?** It made me **question my humanity** and the humanity of all Americans...While I am watching them do these things to the prisoner, I think a lot about Rick. I imagine what it would be like for him in a situation like this. Especially with a woman here to watch. How much it would distress him. The face is not the same, but the prisoner’s eyes look a lot like Rick’s. The same shape of eyes, the same eye colour. The same lashes...What would it be like for him? As I watch, I imagine Rick. I imagine Rick in this room.” (Kayla Williams, *Love My Rifle More Than You* (W.W. Norton, 2006), p. 249.)

An abstract painting on the left side of the slide. It features two overlapping profiles of human heads facing each other. The profiles are filled with vibrant, swirling colors: pinks, purples, blues, greens, and yellows. The background is dark, making the colorful profiles stand out. The style is expressive and painterly.

# Who and what do we see?

## Constructing Self/Other identities through place-making

- Williams has the ability of constructing Self/Other identities through place-making.
- Williams attempts to place someone else, someone familiar to her to pursue a mode of human recognisability with someone else, lost in the frame of a collectivised (in)humanity.
- She imagines Rick in the same room.
- One's perceiving of another's joy or sorrow lies at the root of empathy.
- The prisoner in his isolated appearance does much to allow Williams' empathic outlook. Un-stereotyped – through association, the Iraqi prisoner can exist in a humanised frame.

# The People and the Olive

- Nobody could convince me that trees whose uprooting required such effort by the powerful bulldozer were newly planted saplings! They were mature, well-rooted trees, and to reach that size in the inhospitable desert, **they must have enjoyed loving care for many years, several decades at least.** So the Bedouin families living there were long-time residents, not 'squatter' newcomers! (Kidron, 2004:18)
- I think about this especially when I see orchards and greenhouses and fruit trees destroyed - **just years of care and cultivation.** I think about you and how long it takes to make things grow and what a labour of love it is. I really think, in a similar situation, most people would defend themselves as best they could. **I think Uncle Craig would. I think probably Grandma would. I think I would.** (Corrie, 2008: 272-273)



# The People and the Olive

- Timothy Young's remark (01:22 Part 7) how the trees represent a particular relationship with his memory which is an important dimension in the construction of a narrative of the Palestinian farmers and their historical connection to their land:
- 'Families name these trees. They know the name of every tree in their orchard and it passes on from generation to generation. To me this is the most overwhelming thing that has happened to me since I've been here. The meaning of that they would dedicate a tree to us when the tree means so much to the Palestinian people is beyond any thank you anyone could have said or done or any gesture.'





## Sites of structural otherness

- Al-Khalil (Hebron)
- Challenging frame of ‘nothingness’ – ‘People and the Olive’
- Holocaust memorial at Auschwitz as offsetting Nazi depersonalisation
- Rachel Corrie’s experience in Gaza, ‘Let me Stand Alone’ -”Now I cannot see the ocean”



# The trouble with generalising

- Herbert Kelman reminds us that to humanise someone is to “perceive him as an individual, independent and distinguishable from others, capable of making choices...” Herbert Kelman (1973). “Violence Without Moral Restraint: Reflections on the Dehumanization of Victims and Victimizers”.
- The same way one’s predispositions to err or one’s likes and dislikes are a necessary part of one’s self then so too must they exist in the other, which would mean an acceptance of being disagreed with or even in being disliked.



# The trouble with generalising

Human codes of recognisability - “There was nothing on him, no photographs, no letters, or identification. That would disappoint the intelligence, but it was fine with me. I wanted this boy to remain anonymous. I wanted to think of him not human being with a name, age, and family, but as a dead enemy. That made everything easier.”

Phillip Caputo, *A Rumor of War* (Pimlico, London: 1999), p. 120.

Grossman, ‘On Killing’ – Altitude and Attitude

Y. Yizhar, *Khirbet Khizeh* - “The people who would live in this village – wouldn’t the walls cry out in their ears? Those sights, screams that were screamed and that were not screamed, the confused innocence of dazed sheep, the submissiveness of the weak, and their heroism, that unique heroism of the weak who didn’t know what to do and were unable to do anything, the silenced weak – would the new settlers not sense that the air here was heavy with shades, voices, and stares?” S. Yizhar, *Khirbet Khizeh* (London, Granta Publications: 2011).

An abstract, textured artwork on the left side of the slide. It features organic, flowing shapes in shades of pink, purple, blue, green, and yellow, set against a dark background. The texture appears to be that of a painting or a digital brushstroke effect.

# The trouble with generalising

*Indeed, We have honoured  
the children of Adam, carried  
them on land and sea,  
granted them good and lawful  
provisions, and privileged  
them far above many of Our  
creatures. 17:70*

# What is dehumanisation?

- Dehumanisation is the relegating of another to a distant, sub-other. It is the seeing in the other much less and sometimes a complete absence of what one sees in oneself. **All that is morally reprehensible is defined in that other.**
- On mental canvases the dehumanised other is painted with broad strokes and wide brushes. **There are no identifications, no fine lines, no nuances, no greys and no subtle outlines.**
- Untermensch vs Übermensch



# Why do we dehumanise?

- The one we dehumanise, we now count as the Other.
- The Other consists of incomplete parts, insufficiently human and thus inadequate for a place in the world, our world.
- For the dehumanised, principles of morality no longer apply and any moral restraints against abuse, torture or killing are readily overcome.
- Dehumanisation is effacing, it is to contort another's image and ascribe to it all the qualities one would find repugnant to have within one's self.

# What is dehumanisation?

**49:11 - Believers, no one group of men should jeer at another, who may after all be better than them; no one group of women should jeer at another, who may after all be better than them; do not speak ill of one another; do not use offensive nicknames for one another. How bad it is to be called a mischief-maker after accepting faith! Those who do not repent of this behaviour are evildoers.**

The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, **“The greatest propensity for good or evil in a man lies between his two lips,”** meaning his tongue.

**Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān 5717**



# What is dehumanisation?

Dehumanisation always starts with language, often followed by images.

- The Untermenschen in the Holocaust.
- Rats and disease, rodents in everything from military pamphlets to children's books.
- Hutus and the Rwanda genocide called Tutsis "cockroaches".
- Indigenous people are often referred to as "savages". Ethnic cleansing in Palestine
- Serbs called Bosnians "aliens".



# Othering and race

## The Qur'anic paradigm:

- “Another of His signs is the creation of the heavens and earth, and the diversity of your languages and colours. There truly are signs in this for those who know.” The Qur'an, Chapter 30, Verse 22.
- “People, We created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognize one another. In God's eyes, the most honoured of you are the ones most mindful of Him: God is all-Knowing, all-Aware.” The Qur'an, Chapter 49, Verse 13.

## God, man, and the pursuit for human dignity –

“And We have certainly honoured the children of Adam...” The Qur'an, Chapter 17, Verse 70.



# The Haunted Oak by Paul Laurence Dunbar (1900)

Pray why are you so bare, so bare,  
Oh, bough of the old oak-tree;  
And why, when I go through the shade you throw,  
Runs a shudder over me?

My leaves were green as the best, I trow,  
And sap ran free in my veins,  
But I saw in the moonlight dim and weird  
A guiltless victim's pains.

I bent me down to hear his sigh;  
I shook with his gurgling moan,  
And I trembled sore when they rode away,  
And left him here alone.

They'd charged him with the old, old crime,  
And set him fast in jail:  
Oh, why does the dog howl all night long,  
And why does the night wind wail?

He prayed his prayer and he swore his oath,  
And he raised his hand to the sky;  
But the beat of hoofs smote on his ear,  
And the steady tread drew nigh.

Who is it rides by night, by night,  
Over the moonlit road?  
And what is the spur that keeps the pace,  
What is the galling goad?

And now they beat at the prison door,  
“Ho, keeper, do not stay!  
We are friends of him whom you hold within,  
And we fain would take him away

“From those who ride fast on our heels  
With mind to do him wrong;  
They have no care for his innocence,  
And the rope they bear is long.”

They have fooled the jailer with lying words,  
They have fooled the man with lies;  
The bolts unbar, the locks are drawn,  
And the great door open flies.

Now they have taken him from the jail,  
And hard and fast they ride,  
And the leader laughs low down in his throat,  
As they halt my trunk beside.

Oh, the judge, he wore a mask of black,  
And the doctor one of white,  
And the minister, with his oldest son,  
Was curiously bedight.

Oh, foolish man, why weep you now?  
’Tis but a little space,  
And the time will come when these shall dread  
The mem’ry of your face.

I feel the rope against my bark,  
And the weight of him in my grain,  
I feel in the throe of his final woe  
The touch of my own last pain.

And never more shall leaves come forth  
On the bough that bears the ban;  
I am burned with dread, I am dried and dead,  
From the curse of a guiltless man.

And ever the judge rides by, rides by,  
And goes to hunt the deer,  
And ever another rides his soul  
In the guise of a mortal fear.

And ever the man he rides me hard,  
And never a night stays he;  
For I feel his curse as a haunted bough,  
On the trunk of a haunted tree.

*This poem is in the public domain.*

# Othering and race

## The slaughter of Emmett Till 1955

- “We buried Emmett. The state of Mississippi said that that was not Emmett. They said: that it was impossible for a body to deteriorate that much in that length of time. But what they didn’t say, they didn’t bring out that the body was badly beaten, that the river water had burst the skin and it had peeled off the body. The water was hot, the beating was brutal. Then to beat him, **they didn’t hear his cries. They didn’t touch them** whatsoever. This one little colored boy that did hear them said that he heard screams coming from that barn about an hour and a half. He cried for God, **he cried for his mother**, he pleaded with them. But they were having such a good time, so **they didn’t consider that he was a human being.**”

(Clenora Hudson-Weems, *Emmett Till: The Sacrificial Lamb of the Civil Rights Movement* (AuthorHouse, Bloomington, Indiana: 2006), p. 241.



# Othering and race

John Howard Griffin, 'Black Like Me'

- “I learned within a very few hours that no one was judging me by my **qualities as a human individual** and everyone was judging me by my pigment. As soon as white men or women saw me, they automatically **assumed** I possessed **a whole set of false characteristics** (false not only to me but to all black men). They **could not see me** or any other black man as a human individual because they **buried us under the garbage of their stereotyped view of us**. They saw us as **“different” from themselves** in fundamental ways: we were irresponsible; we were different in our sexual morals; we were intellectually limited; we had a God-given sense of rhythm; we were lazy and happy-go-lucky; we loved watermelon and fried chicken. How could white men ever really know black men if on every contact the white man’s stereotyped view of the black man got in the way? I never knew a black man who felt this stereotyped view fit him. Always, in every encounter even with “good whites,” we had the feeling that the white person **was not talking with us but with his image of us.**” (John Howard Griffin, *Black Like Me* (Signet, New York: 1996), p. 166.





## Othering and race

- Chris Weedon defines “Othering” as referring to the process of “constructing another people or group as radically different to oneself or one’s own group, usually on the basis of racist and/or ethnocentric discourses” (2004, 166).
- Abu Dharr insulted Bilal with reference to his mother - “O son of a black woman!”
- The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “Have you insulted Bilal by his mother? By the One who revealed the Book to Muḥammad, no one is better than another except by righteous deeds.” Shu’ab al-Imān 4760
- Prophet’s final sermon on ‘Arafat



## Reel Bad Arabs

“The Arabs so far have demonstrated an incapacity for disciplined and abiding unity. They experience **collective outbursts** of enthusiasm but do not pursue patiently **collective endeavours**, which are usually embraced half-heartedly. They show lack of **coordination** and harmony in organization and function, nor have they revealed an ability for **cooperation**. Any **collective action** for **common benefit** or mutual profit is alien to them.”

Sania Hamady (1960). Temperament and Character of the Arabs.

# Seeing the Other in Iraq

- Aday (2004) reveals that “Of more than 1,800 stories on six networks (NBC, ABC, CBS, CNN, Fox, and al-Jazeera) at the war’s outset, only seventy-three stories mentioned Iraqi casualties.” (Aday, 2004: 8;15;24)
- But you know what, Virginia Tech is one day in one Iraqi neighbourhood. Imagine if for forty-eight hours the media covered the victims of this war with the same compassion, the same empathy, the same humanity as they covered the shooting victims of Virginia Tech. This war would end tomorrow. The war would end tomorrow (Scahill, 2007).





# On the Fringes: structural otherness

An othered group is **devalued, depersonalised and susceptible to discrimination**. Examples?

Learning a lesson from Julaybib – **verbal and actualised empathy**

The mentally challenged – ‘**O mother of so and so**’

Paradigmatic shifts - “**Take us to the man with vision...**”

- Discerning social value and importance as a measure of respect



## On the Fringes: structural otherness

Once, when arranging to visit a blind man in Medina, the Prophet told his companions that the man instead was not in fact altogether blind:

Jabir bin ‘Abd-Allāh said, the Prophet said,

“Take us to the man with vision who lives in Banū Wāqif so that we can visit him.’ And that man was blind.

(Al-Bayḥaqī, as-Sunan al-Kubra 21372)



## On the Fringes: structural otherness

*Indeed, it is not the eyes that  
are blind, but it is the hearts in  
the chests that grow blind.*

*22:46*



# On the Fringes: structural otherness

Prophet Yūsuf :

“and then sold him for a small price,  
for a few pieces of silver: so little did  
they value him.”

The Qur'an, Chapter 12, Verse 20

# Our perceptions of human worth

- Learning a lesson from Julaybib:

1. Appearances, character and the individual human narrative
2. Finding space with the socially distant
3. Social transformation from the Prophet's advice to Abu Dharr
4. Considering paradigmatic shifts 1. Julaybib 2. Zahir 3. "Take us to the man with vision..."



# ‘I’m a human being’

- “No matter what people think of me, I know I’m a human first.” Ron Davis
- It was the Prophet’s nature to make people feel relaxed and special in his company, so much so that each attendee in his gatherings would think he was the most important person in that gathering.
- Prophet with Abu Bakr’s father
- How can we ensure to leave such an impression on everyone we meet?
  - Andre Trocme and the village of Chambon
  - The most illustrious example of the Prophet (peace be upon him):
- “He would sit with the poor and offer food to and eat with the needy, honouring the virtuous and softening the hearts of people of status by treating them kindly. He upheld ties of kinship without favouring his relatives over those who were better than them, and he did not treat anyone harshly. “Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn 2/430-442



# Transitioning landscapes and sites of meaning

- Sulaymān (‘alayhi salām) and the place of ‘**here**’: “And there were gathered together unto Solomon his armies...” (Think of examples of ‘your’ spaces)
- Sulaymān (‘alayhi salām)’s ‘**there**’ places: “Till, when they reached the Valley of the Ants...” (Think of new spaces, unknown places,
- A *dā’ī*’s transitioning through landscapes or in the encountering of others - smaller, perhaps weaker, disenfranchised, poorer – is a reflective moment to express his utmost dependence on Allāh, gratitude and earnestness
- Sulaymān (‘alayhi salām) and the place of ‘**elsewhere**’: And (Sulaymān) smiled, laughing at her speech, and said: My Lord, arouse me to be thankful for Thy favor...”
- It is thus essential that the *dā’ī*’s heart remains ever present in the remembrance of Allāh. Despite what he self-witnesses of success and abilities in delivering the message, he always returns his affairs to Allāh.

# Early guidance in empathy: Sūrah al-Duḥa

- In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy
- By the morning brightness
- and by the night when it grows still,
- your Lord has not forsaken you [Prophet], nor does He hate
- you,
- and the future will be better for you than the past;
- Your Lord is sure to give you so much that you will be well satisfied.
- Did He not find you an orphan and shelter you?
- Did He not find you lost and guide you?
- Did He not find you in need and make you self-sufficient?
- So do not be harsh with the orphan
- and do not chide the one who asks for help;
- talk about the blessings of your Lord.



# Early guidance in empathy: Sūrah al-Duḥā

- The empathy bearing in the chapter's verses is in relation to what the Prophet (peace be upon him) experienced as a young man. That personal circumstances of poverty and/or loneliness can be understood in relation to how others are to be perceived and treated teaches us the importance of having a field of affective and cognitive insight in our relation with others.
- Ibn Kathir explains "So do not be harsh with the orphan" by commenting "remember when you were an orphan"! "And do not chide the one who asks for help" by commenting "remember when you were poor" and "to be unto the orphan like a merciful father." Qatada said that it means "to treat the poor with mercy and softness."

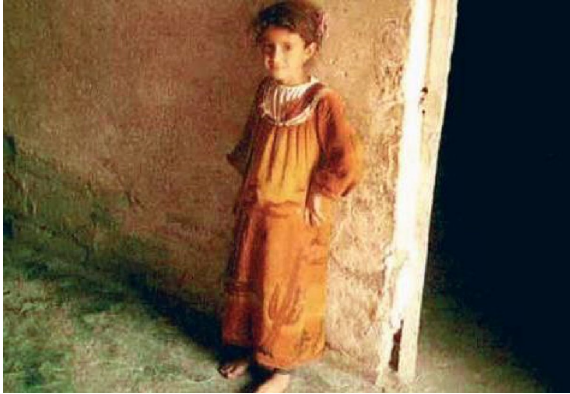


# Defining Empathy

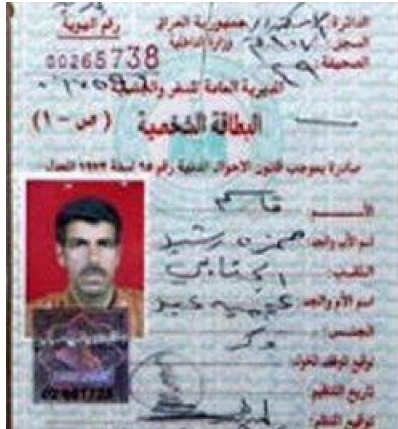
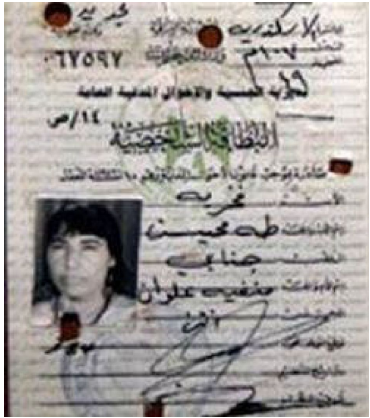
- “Empathy is the capacity to share the happiness or sadness, the emotions and feelings of another person. This ability leads to understanding, to compassion and to a wide range of other connections between people. There are two ways that we are able to experience empathy: one, because we have been in the situation that the other person has. We know from personal experience how it feels, and the other is because we can imagine how they feel. Our ability to imagine may come from a similar experience of our own, from a story of a friend or family member who has had that experience or from the observations of what happens to a stranger. And although empathy can be a way of sharing someone else’s joy or happiness, the empathy that connects difficulties is the one that’s most likely to move us to action. Understanding the troubles of others can bring a focused response, a focused kind of help by trying to right a wrong, by trying to fix a problem, or simply by sharing an understanding. These actions can be as simple as a smile or as complex as an international relief effort in Haiti.” (04:03-05:19)
- Lisa Rossbacher, ‘Empathy: Walking in Another’s Shoes’: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VPSFWIYoBTE>



# The Mahmudiyya Killings



Steven Green stated that he raped the 14-year old Abeer and killed her alongside her family because 'he didn't view Iraqis as human.'



Fakhriya Taha Muhsin, Qasim Hamza Rasheed and Hadeel Qassim Hamza al-Janabi, mother, father and sister of Abeer Qassin Al-Janabi murdered alongside Abeer on March 12, 2006.



# The Mahmudiyya Killings

Sergeant Mejla: “You just sort of try to block out the act that they’re human beings and see them as enemies...You call them ‘hajis. you know. You do all the things that make it easier to deal with killing them and mistreating them.”

(Philip Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: How Good People Turn Evil* (Rider Books: 2007), pp 307-308; C.J. Nemeth, “Differential Contributions to Majority and Minority Influence,” *Psychological Review* 93 (1986), pp. 23-32.)

Green, also an ex-drone operator, stated that he raped the 14-year old Abeer and killed her alongside her family because ‘he didn’t view Iraqis as human.’

Mail Foreign Service. “I didn’t think of Iraqis as humans,’ says U.S. soldier who raped 14-year-old girl before killing her and her family’.

[dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1340207/I-didnt-think-Iraqis-humansays-U-S-soldier-raped-14-year-old-girl-killing-her-family.html](http://dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1340207/I-didnt-think-Iraqis-humansays-U-S-soldier-raped-14-year-old-girl-killing-her-family.html).



# The Mahmudiyya Killings

“Imagine where her and other Iraqi women would have been today if they weren’t murdered. I could imagine Abeer in school (if the schools were still or are still functioning, of course), preparing perhaps to attend college in the hopes of bettering her society. Or maybe she would be at home, eating with her family or reading a poem. She would be a living, breathing, human being. But she was murdered.”



‘What is unseen and now lost, her family says, is her dream of moving to the big city and getting married.’; ‘strong woman’; ‘proud to be young’; ‘relatives recounted their aspirations for a better life’; ‘the family was close and dreamed of owning a home, sending the four children to school and living in peace’; Kassem al-Janabi (Abeer’s father) ‘was so fond of his sister Ameena’s children he named his own girls after them. He called the oldest Abeer, which means “fragrance of flowers”, and the younger girl Hadeel, which means “sound of the water...”’



# Empathy as perspective taking

- Consider the man and the thirsty dog –
- “The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, ‘A man felt very thirsty while he was on the way, there he came across a well. He went down the well, quenched his thirst and came out. Meanwhile **he saw a dog panting and licking mud because of excessive thirst**. He said to himself, “**This dog is suffering from thirst as I did.**’ So, he went down the well again and filled his shoe with water and watered it. Allāh thanked him for that deed and forgave him. The people said, ‘O Allāh’s Messenger! Is there a reward for us in serving the animals?’ He replied: ‘Yes, there is a reward for serving any living being.’” Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 2466
- The Prophet (peace be upon him) explained, “The merciful will be shown mercy by the Most Merciful. Be merciful to those on the earth and the One in the heavens will have mercy upon you.” Sunan al-Tirmidhī 1924

# The Prophet and Empathy

- The Prophet (peace be upon him) was concerned about people learning to have empathy for others.

The frame of **togetherness** and the **perspective taking** is illustrative in the following narration:

“Abu Umāma reported: A young man came to the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, and he said, “O Messenger of Allāh, give me permission to commit adultery.” The people turned to rebuke him, saying, “Quiet! Quiet!” The Prophet said, “Come here.” The young man came close and he told him to sit down. The Prophet said, “Would you like that for your mother?” The man said, “No, by Allāh, may I be sacrificed for you.” The Prophet said, “Neither would people like it for their mothers. Would you like that for your daughter?” The man said, “No, by Allāh, may I be sacrificed for you.” The Prophet said, “Neither would people like it for 103 their daughters. Would you like that for your sister?” The man said, “No, by Allāh, may I be sacrificed for you.” The Prophet said, “Neither would people like it for their sisters. Would you like that for your aunts?” The man said, “No, by Allāh, may I be sacrificed for you.” The Prophet said, “Neither would people like it for their aunts.” Then, the Prophet placed his hand on him and he said, “O Allāh, forgive his sins, purify his heart, and guard his chastity.” After that, the young man never again inclined to anything sinful.”



# The Beauty of Character

- To be forbearing is to win a war against your own ego. **Forbearance is self-control and restraint.** It is a hallmark of mercy and patience and good character
- The virtue of exemplifying beautiful character
- Prophet's advice to Mu'ādh ibn Jabal

Ibn Baṭṭāl said: “In line with the character of a believer is to lower the wings of humility unto mankind, to have gentle speech, and leaving off roughness in speech to them, and that is from the strongest means of sincere affection.” Faḥ al-Bārī, 10/528



# The Beauty of Character

- Repel evil with what is better than it

“Good and evil cannot be equal. [Prophet], repel evil with what is better and your enemy will become as close as an old and valued friend” (41:34) that it means, “Allah commands the believers to be patient when they feel angry, to be forbearing when confronted with ignorance, and to forgive when they are mistreated. If they do this, Allah will save them from Satan and subdue their enemies to them until they become like close friends.” 41:34

- Let your character speak not just words
- Not to be people of ego but to have forbearance.
- Show beauty of Islamic manners
- don't undermine the impact of a good word



# A Historical Othering

- The Spanish inquisition
- ‘Hagarene beasts’
- Brenton Tarrant, ‘The Great Replacement’ and terror in Christchurch - “But if you attempt to live in European lands, anywhere west of the Bosphorus. We will kill you and drive you **roaches** from our lands.”

(‘The Great Replacement’ - [https://www.ilfoglio.it/userUpload/The\\_Great\\_Replacementconvertito.pdf](https://www.ilfoglio.it/userUpload/The_Great_Replacementconvertito.pdf))

- ASK YOURSELF, WHAT WOULD POPE URBAN II DO?”
- Radovan Karadžić and the genocide of Bosnia – “Muslims will disappear, that people will disappear from the face of the earth...”



# Rwanda genocide in context

- In the 19th century present-day Rwanda and Burundi, predominantly Christian countries, became Germany colonies, and the new powers founded a feudal society in the countries.
- Made up of two dominant tribes, the Hutu and the Tutsi, the Tutsi nobility descended from cattle ranchers. After Germany lost the First World War, the League of Nations entrusted the East African mandate of Rwanda and Burundi (Ruanda-Urundi) to Belgium, and thus French became the language of the government.
- From the 1930s, the Belgian government made it mandatory for all Africans to carry identity cards displaying their ethnicity, language and religion. The Rwandans were divided into three ethnic groups, 80 to 85% Hutu, 14 to 19% Tutsi and 1% Twa.
- As colonisers do, practising a divide and rule policy, the Belgian separated and marginalised the groups along racial lines determining that the Tutsi were a superior race who had lighter skin, were taller and had thin noses – a more European type look. The Hutu on the other hand were held to be inferior, with darker skin and shorter statures.
- The Belgium government thus granted more power, status, economic and educational privileges to the Tutsis. Muslims in Rwanda only represented a very small proportion of the country's inhabitants and had long suffered the brunt of a negative propaganda



# Rwanda genocide in context

- Due to a very intense program of dehumanisation of the Tutsi population, much of the violence was carried out between neighbour and neighbour, husband and wife, clergy and congregation, teacher and students.
- Hutu militia, the interhamwe, resorted to hacking to death men and women they had grown up with, who attended the same churches, the same schools, spoke the same language and even intermarried.
- The campaign of Otherising the Tutsis was fermented and disseminated through schools, media and in political rhetoric, inspiring armed youth to kill openly.
- The murderers would force others to do the same, evoking slogans of “do or die”, meaning kill or get killed, enticing them with promises of food, money and an inheritance of land belonging to the Tutsis they kill.
- The Tutsi were castigated with a “spoiled identity”, a state of nothingness, as “things”, “cockroaches”, as “animals”



# Rwanda genocide in context

- Similarly, the label of “gooks” was used to otherise the Vietnamese in the My Lai massacre in which hundreds of Vietnamese civilians were killed by American soldiers.

“I enjoyed the shooting and the killing. I was literally turned on when I saw a gook get shot. When a GI got shot, even if I didn’t know him...that would bother me. A GI was real. But if a gook got killed, it was like me going out here and stepping on a roach.” (Mark Baker)

- Glenn Gray recounts an incident from World War II:

“When a Japanese soldier was “flushed” from his hiding place well behind the lines of combat, “the unit, made up of relatively green troops, was resting and joking. But they seized their rifles and began using him as a live target while he dashed frantically around the clearing in search of safety. The soldiers found his movements uproariously funny and were prevented by their laughter from making early end of the unfortunate man. Finally, however, they succeeded in killing him, and the incident cheered the whole platoon, giving them something to talk and joke about for days afterward. In relating this story...the veteran emphasized the similarity of the enemy soldier to an animal. None of the American soldiers apparently ever considered that he may have had human feelings of fear and the wish to be spared.”





# Rwanda – The path to reconciliation

- “PIO: We no longer saw a human being when we turned up a Tutsi in the swamps. I mean a person like us, sharing similar thoughts and feelings. The hunt was savage, the hunters were savage, the prey was savage-savagery took over the mind.”

*Jean Hatzfeld, A Time for Machetes: The Rwandan Genocide: The Killers Speak (Serpents Tail, London: 2008), p. 42.*

49:13 – “People, We created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognize one another. In God’s eyes, the most honoured of you are the ones most mindful of Him: God is all knowing, all aware.”

Mufti Saleh Habimana – Repel evil with what is better

“Here there are no Hutus, and no Tutsis, but here there are only human beings.”

# The path to reconciliation

- Citing the example of the Prophet's (peace be upon him) return to Makkah, Mufti Saleh emphasised how patience and forbearance are always the hallmark of a Muslim's character wherever he is, and that, as Allāh mentions in the Qur'ān, it is these qualities that will inspire goodwill and reconciliation between people:
- "but only those who are steadfast in patience, only those who are blessed with great righteousness, will attain to such goodness." 41:35





# The Genocide of Rwanda '94

- In Jean Hatzfeld's very harrowing account of the Rwandan genocide, made up largely of testimonials by perpetrators we come to read grizzly accounts of human beings who describe in graphic detail the events of the genocide in which the processes of Othering and dehumanisation are made plain:
- "JOSEPH-DESIRE: The one who rushed off machete in hand, he listened to nothing anymore. He forgot everything, first of all his level of intelligence. Doing the same thing every day meant we didn't have to think about what we were doing. We went out and came back without having a single thought. We hunted because it was the order of the day, until the day was over. Our arms ruled our heads; in any case our heads no longer had their say."



# The Genocide of Rwanda '94

- “FULGENCE: We became more and more cruel, more and more calm, more and more bloody. But we did not see that we were becoming more and more killers. The more we cut, the more cutting became child’s play if I may say so. In the evening you might meet a colleague. For a few, it turned into a treat, would call out, “You, my friend, buy me a Primus or I’ll cut open your skull, because I have a taste for that now!” But for many, it was simply that a long day had just come to an end. We stopped thinking about obligations or advantages – we thought only about continuing what we had started. In any case, it held us so tight, we could not think about its effect on us”.
- “ADALBERT: At the start of the killings, we worked fast and skimmed along because we were eager. In the middle of the killings, we killed casually. Time and triumph encouraged us to loaf around. At first, we could feel more patriotic or more deserving when we managed to catch some fugitives. Later on, those kinds of feelings deserted us. We stopped listening to fine words on the radio and from the authorities. We killed to keep the job going. Some were tired of these blood assignments.”



# The Genocide of Rwanda '94

## - A MURDERER'S EXPLANATION

- “PIO: “For my part, I offer you an explanation: it is as if I had let another individual take on my own living appearance, and the habits of my heart, without a single pang in my soul. This killer was indeed me, as to the offence he committed and the blood he shed, but he is a stranger to me in his ferocity. I admit and recognize my obedience at that time, my victims, my fault, but I fail to recognize the wickedness of the one who raced through the marshes on my legs, carrying my machete. That wickedness seems to belong to another self with a heavy heart. The most serious changes in my body were my invisible parts, such as the soul or the feelings that go with it. Therefore I alone do not recognize myself in that man.”

# Causes behind the rescuing ethos

- Ramadan
- Spirit of unity in salah
- Justice, Propagation, Prophetic character
- **“The Muslims handled themselves well in ‘94, and I wanted to be like them,”** said Alex Rutiririza, explaining why he converted to Islam last year. With killing all around, he said, **the safest place to be back then was in a Muslim neighborhood.”**

(Marc Lacey, 'Since '94 Horror, Rwandans Turn Toward Islam'

- <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/07/world/since-94-horror-rwandans-turn-toward-islam.html>.)





# The Genocide of Rwanda '94 and the growth of Islam

- “so that [in time] God might admit to His grace whomever He wills.” 48:25
- Stories of conversions to Islam
  - April 7, 2004 in the New York Post entitled ‘Since ‘94 Horror, Rwandans Turn Toward Islam’ described the responses of the people of Rwanda:
    - “Nobody died in a mosque,” said Ramadhani Rugema, executive secretary of the Muslim Association of Rwanda. “No Muslim wanted any other Muslim to die. We stood up to the militias. And we helped many non-Muslims get away.”
- The opening up of new spaces of understanding between the people of that country:
  - “Sagahutu said his father had worked at a hospital where he was friendly with a Muslim family. They took Sagahutu in, even though they were Hutus. “I watched them pray five times a day. I ate with them and I saw how they lived,” he said. “When they pray, Hutu and Tutsi are in the same mosque. There is no difference. I needed to see that.”

(Emily Wax, ‘Islam Attracting Many Survivors of Rwanda Genocide’-  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2002/09/23/islam-attracting-many-survivors-of-rwanda-genocide/58cd661cc2f3-4b24-b743-4ffc1413c647>.)

# A Closer Look – ‘And who is better in speech than he who calls to Allāh?’

- Ibn Abbās explained the verse, “Good and evil cannot be equal. [Prophet], repel evil with what is better and your enemy will become as close as an old and valued friend” (41:34) that it means, “Allah commands the believers to be patient when they feel angry, to be forbearing when confronted with ignorance, and to forgive when they are mistreated. If they do this, Allah will save them from Satan and subdue their enemies to them until they become like close friends.”



# A Closer Look – ‘And who is better in speech than he who calls to Allāh?’

- The Muslim holds on to patience and remembers that it is not he who changes anyone’s heart, but that it is Allāh who turns hearts.
- Sometimes a display of magnanimity can be far more expressive than a sophisticated argument. At the heart of a discussion is precisely a heart, one that searches for a beautiful character.
- It might show that people want not only to be guided, but to find an honourable guide in their midst.



# A Closer Look – ‘And who is better in speech than he who calls to Allāh?

- Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī said: “The believer is forbearing; he does not behave ignorantly even if ignorance is done unto him. He is forbearing and does not wrong others. If he is wronged then he forgives. He does not cut off from people; and if he is cut off then he reconciles. He does not show miserliness. And if he is shown miserliness, then he instead shows patience.” Ibn Abī Dunya, 1246/54-55
- ‘Amr ibn al-‘As (Allāh be pleased with him), said, “The truly forbearing one is not one who is forbearing to those who tolerate him and instead insults whoever insults him. Rather, the truly forbearing one is forbearing to both those who tolerate him and to those who insult him.” al-Mudārāh al-Nās 6





# The Paradigm of Mercy

- In our engagement with others, we should remember that we as humans are mostly comforted by similar things – displays of kindness and mercy.
- Consider Thumāma ibn Uthāl
- The Prophet (peace be upon him) explained, “The merciful will be shown mercy by the Most Merciful. Be merciful to those on the earth and the One in the heavens will have mercy upon you.” Sunan al-Tirmidhī 1924

Ibn al-Qayyim explained the Prophet’s (peace be upon him) words:

“And Allāh is merciful, and He loves the merciful ones, and He veils the sins of people and He loves those who veil the sins of others ”Whoever pardons others, Allāh will pardon him; whoever forgives others, Allāh will forgive him; whoever excuses others, Allāh will excuse him; whoever shows excellence unto others, Allāh will deal excellently towards him. As you do so shall be done unto you, so be how you choose for indeed Allāh will be unto you as you are unto His servants.” Ibn al-Qayyim, Al-Wābil al-Şayyib, pp. 53-56.

# Everyone has come from somewhere

- “No matter what people think of me, I know I’m a human first.” Ron Davis
- It was the Prophet’s nature to make people feel relaxed and special in his company, so much so that each attendee in his gatherings would think he was the most important person in that gathering.
- Prophet with Abu Bakr’s father
- How can we ensure to leave such an impression on everyone we meet?
  - Andre Trocme and the village of Chambon
  - The most illustrious example of the Prophet (peace be upon him):
- “He would sit with the poor and offer food to and eat with the needy, honouring the virtuous and softening the hearts of people of status by treating them kindly. He upheld ties of kinship without favouring his relatives over those who were better than them, and he did not treat anyone harshly. “Ṭḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn 2/430-442

